

Woman

The Healthy Woman

By Jan Foster

Q. I have heard that yoga keeps people youthful. How can I use yoga to slow down the aging process and help me age gracefully?

A. Because yoga is relaxing and energizing, both mentally and physically, it is an excellent practice at any stage of your life. Yoga is very adaptable to all levels of fitness and flexibility, so it's never too late to start. Here are some of the biggest benefits yoga offers to slow down the aging process.

- Yoga reverses the effects of gravity. The easiest and most effective way to slow down the aging process is to reverse gravitational pull of the earth on your body. In yoga, we use many gentle and inverted poses to bring circulation to the upper body and brain without putting strain on the heart. After age 50, it becomes even more important to reverse the downward pull of gravity on the body, because the blood flow to the brain gradually decreases as we get older. Gentle inversions also reduce high blood pressure and varicose veins.

- Yoga builds strength and flexibility. Most popular forms of weight-bearing exercise that strengthen the body also tighten the musculoskeletal system and add to the stiffness that comes with aging. Yoga strengthens the body and

makes it more flexible at the same time. The muscles are lengthened as they are strengthened, creating a leaner look and more grace and fluidity in your daily movements. Yoga also helps reverse the aging process by moving each joint in the body through its full range of motion and is particularly helpful for relieving arthritis, as well as fibromyalgia.

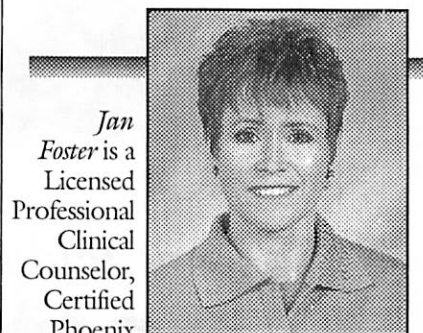
- Yoga builds bone naturally. Most people are now aware of how important weight bearing activity is in preventing osteoporosis. Yoga is a superior form of weight-bearing exercise using the weight of your own body. A yoga practice stimulates bone growth in the entire body.

- Yoga improves and preserves good posture. Yoga prevents and can sometimes even reverse the most visible and obvious symptom of aging — one that can't be disguised or transformed cosmetically — the shortening and rounding of the spine known as kyphosis or dowager's hump. You may even find yourself getting taller as you practice yoga — I did. I am now a full inch taller since I started a regular practice of yoga 10 years ago.

- Yoga counters the 10-pound weight gain per decade. Most people put on close to 10 pounds a decade after age 20, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. A body that's over 40 generally doesn't operate with the

same efficiency it did at 20, so you need different eating strategies to maintain a healthy weight. Yoga can help in three ways:

1. The mental focus created by regular yoga or meditation practice tends to make you more mindful of what you're eating.
2. The calming effect of a regular yoga or meditation practice helps you eat less emotionally from boredom or stress.
3. Vigorous yoga is aerobic, providing the same fat-burning benefits as walking and running, with the added benefit of building upper body strength.



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Rising Yoga Therapist and Certified Yoga Instructor. Jan offers a comprehensive, holistic approach to self-discovery and personal transformation with her unique blend of practical corporate business experience, powerful mind/body methods and innovative applications of transpersonal psychology.